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14 September 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Briefing Note on NSSM 99, "US Strategy Options for Cambodia"

1. Attached is the final draft of NSSM 99, which is scheduled for discussion by the Senior Review Group for Southeast Asia at 1530 on Tuesday, 15 September. This draft is the end result of an eight-hour session on Saturday by the senior working group, which addressed a draft written by a panel that worked, literally, all night on Thursday. Despite the great degree of effort that went into its preparation, in our opinion the attached paper is not very helpful as an instrument for shaping a crisp, top-level review of the policy issues involved. This version is a considerable improvement over the text tabled by the NSC Staff last Wednesday, but that judgment could be considered as damnation via faint praise. Part of the problem is that the NSC drafters almost totally ignored the quite good work of the four separate panels which were specifically established to produce various sections of what was then supposed to be edited into a final paper.

2. The present version of NSSM 99 is long on obtuse analytic arguments (supported by systems analysis-type mathematics) and short on any clear, concise presentation of the key issues and decisions facing the United States in Indochina in general, and Cambodia in particular. The paper pretends to examine US options within a clearly defined conceptual framework and in light of a specific set of US interests and objectives. We consider both the framework and the statement of US interests as inadequate and regret the lack of any corresponding statement of Hanoi's interests.

a. In particular, the paper confines itself to listing various things the US would allegedly like to achieve, but makes no mention of what the US might want to prevent -- e.g., a Communist takeover of Cambodia. This omission is

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deliberate. My colleagues and I argued at some length, but with no success, that the paper should face up to the fact that if Hanoi succeeds in toppling the Lon Nol Government, the Communists will have achieved in Cambodia a kind of major political victory that has long eluded them in Vietnam. In our opinion such a development would have a considerably greater psychological and political impact on Vietnamization and merited more analysis and discussions than the force level ratios and other concrete details on which the paper focussed its attention.

b. Another point the paper ignores, or brushes off in passing allusions, is the fact that what Hanoi does or does not do is crucial to the outcome of any of the strategies offered for consideration. The paper does make passing reference to the fact that any significant increase in the size or nature of the current Communist threat will drive up the costs and risks of each of the options considered, but it fails to make clear the fact that any new strategy adopted by the US would almost certainly cause Hanoi to review its bidding and consider counter-measures.

3. As for what the paper does say, you will note that it outlines four alternative strategies, each of which merits a brief comment:

a. Strategy One (hold the line [] of DOD funds) is a little bizarre because the DOD representatives, who insisted on its inclusion, were trying to reflect what they thought were Secretary Laird's wishes, but did not really understand the Secretary's position. Laird's point is really quite simple. He has no desire to go to Congress for a supplemental appropriation and would like to see this construed as a given in the policy equation.

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b. Strategy Two is State's insertion. It is really a variant on strategy one, except that State is willing to countenance a supplemental (or at least having Defense ask for a supplemental). State's position does have the advantage of making it clear that, under this strategy the US should be prepared to accept the loss of Cambodia if the price of preventing such loss gets too high. It is not clear, however, in candidly acknowledging what the consequences of such a loss might be.

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c. Strategy Three (in its three variants) is rather confused in presentation but basically boils down to various augmentations of what is now being done, with commensurately greater US resource inputs (all requiring a supplemental). All three variants are keyed to a concept of attempting to retain only a portion of Cambodian territory. The size varies with the option in question, but all three include Phnom Penh and all three are basically structured to defend the South Vietnamese border. This analysis ignores the fact that the Communists are already operating in all of the "enclaves" suggested, that the Cambodian Government would most certainly resist any externally dictated de facto partition and that it would be equally reluctant to dispose its forces in a fashion primarily designed to defend the South Vietnamese border.

d. Strategy Four deals with an expanded program of harassing Communist logistic movements through south Laos and northern Cambodia. It is really something different from all of the other three strategies and could, if accepted, probably be grafted onto almost any of them, though it obviously fits most easily with the higher variants of strategy three. The present version of strategy four is a little strange for the following reason: the JCS representative insisted on its inclusion and admitted that he was doing so by direction. In its present form this JCS insertion is actually General Westmoreland's old FULL CRY proposal for an invasion of south Laos dusted off by the Army Staff and apparently blessed by Admiral Moorer. It betrays little appreciation of the political unrealism of proposing large scale, US-supported ARVN actions in Laos or deep in northern Cambodia.

4. Of the four options, the last is the one that most directly affects our parochial interests. Here I think the paper is dealing with a valid problem but in a very peculiar way. What is really needed is a separate study that first re-assesses the vulnerability of the Communists' logistic net in south Laos and Cambodia in light of recently acquired evidence on the Sihanoukville channel, whose functions must now be absorbed by Laos trails. If the review of the evidence indicates that ground harassment

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augmented by aerial interdiction really can put some kind of a meaningful crimp into Hanoi's capabilities, then there should be proposed a whole spectrum of ground actions ranging from the small and covert to the large and inescapably overt. The decision on the optimum action mix within this spectrum would have to be framed in light of conflicting political and military requirements, the former dictating small and covert (or at least deniable) actions and the latter pointing in the direction of forces big enough to do the job.

5. Even though we do not think NSSM 99 is a very good paper in its present form, we do not recommend a complete Agency dissent. We suggest, instead, that during the discussion you might profitably raise some of the points outlined above. If the occasion presents itself you might also register the view that a slightly more deliberate approach in putting such papers together would probably result in a better final product.

[REDACTED]
George A. Carver, Jr.

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Attachment

cc: General Cushman

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